

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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### **The Value of Quiet Benevolence**

An irritable brother who always kept some grievance or issue loaded, called a meeting with the preacher and the four elders of the local church.

He leapt right into his complaint, arguing that all five brethren made a good living, drove late model cars and lived in nice homes, yet, he argued: "You don't ever share your good fortune." His audience listened patiently and then after the outburst, one of the elders said: "How do you know we do not share?" There was no answer. Apparently the agitated brother assumed they didn't, or wanted to believe they were miserly. The elder calmly explained, putting an end to the event: "God does not expect us to prove to you or to anyone the extent of our benevolence. In fact, the larger amount of one's benevolence will not be known on earth." In support of this, he read Matthew 6:1-4, and the meeting ended.

The story illustrates, among other things, a common misunderstanding of individual benevolence. The purpose is not to satisfy witnesses, elicit the applause of men, or prove anything to detractors. One's sharing ought to be so private and unpublicized, when the right hand gives, the left hand has no idea. It should be as Harriet Beecher Stowe once wrote of someone she believed had the spirit of Jesus. She said of this person, that "He had a habit of quiet benevolence," doing more good silently than was common of most people in their public charity. [Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1897]

I read a few years ago of a mystery unfolding in the world of college fund-raising. "During the past few weeks, at least nine universities have received gifts totaling more than \$45 million, and the schools had to promise not to try to find out the giver's identity," (AP, April 16, 2009). I have no idea how this story developed; it was not, to my knowledge, followed up with additional reporting (except perhaps to the IRS). It may turn out that some individual or group of individuals are engaged in quiet benevolence, determined to avoid the typical praise of public, ostentatious giving.

Are you a quiet giver? There is rich spiritual value in this kind of giving. Value for you and the recipient, having this truth connection: "with such sacrifices, God is well pleased." (Hebrews 13:16, see also Matthew 6:1-4)

- Warren Berkley

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## Born This Way?

Many people with homosexual desires claim to have been "born this way." They may believe that a normal, heterosexual marriage is simply out of the question for them. What do the Scriptures have to say about this?

First, in Matthew 19 Jesus does say that some people are unable to have normal marital sexual relations. The disciples, surprised by the strictness of the Lords teaching on divorce, suggest it might be better to avoid marriage altogether. Jesus doesn't disagree, saying, "not everyone can receive this saying," and goes on in verse 12 to describe different kinds of eunuchs. Some are made eunuchs by men, no doubt referring to the cruel practice of mutilation. Some choose to be eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom (voluntary celibacy). But a third category were "born this way" (literally "from the womb"). The plain meaning of this is that marriage is not for everyone, whether it be because of the way they were born, because of some violence done by others, or because of personal choice. But none of these circumstances prevent someone from entering the kingdom, as marriage is not a requirement for all.

What about someone who does have sexual desires, but ones that go against God's laws? Is it possible to have sinful passions that one cannot explain? Yes. Paul addresses this in Romans 7 when he explains how sin had come to life in him. He discusses covetousness, but the same could apply to any sin:

"For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness...For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Rom. 7:7-8, 15; ESV).

We should not be surprised when our passions work against God's will. "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Gal. 5:17; ESV). Peter affirms that the passions of the flesh "wage war against your soul." This is true for all people, not just those with homosexual desires. Desires and feelings are never an excuse to break God's law.

Can we blame God for our temptations since he made us the way we are? James answers emphatically: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (James 1:13-14; ESV). Our desires are our own, and temptation arises when we are enticed by them in unlawful ways; we cannot blame God for this. And dare we begin to think, "Why did he make me this way...," Paul reminds us that this question is out of line (Rom. 9:20).

Someone may honestly wonder, "If I have desires that I feel are part of my biological makeup, would God condemn me for indulging those?" Jesus answers: "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Mt. 5:29-30; ESV).

The man whose hand or eye causes him to sin might try to justify himself—"I was born this way!" Jesus says it's no excuse. The man could plead, "Surely the Lord would not want me to go through life without an eye or a hand!" Jesus says it will be well worth whatever price we have to pay in this life to avoid hell in the next.

To summarize: Yes, it is possible for someone to be incapable of normal sexual relations through no fault of their own, either from birth or as a result of the actions of others. Yes, we all have desires of the flesh that are against the desires of the Spirit. Yes, the Lord expects us to cut off any source of sin, no matter how difficult, painful, and life-altering it may be. To the homosexual who says, "God made me this way," we say, "No matter how different you may feel you are, and even if you believe you have been that way since birth, your temptation to homosexuality is not from God, and he demands that you give it up, no matter the cost."

- Eric Reynolds, via *Biblical Insights*, April, 2015

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## **Give Me The Truth!**

If you are my friend, if you are concerned about my soul, give me the truth. Do not flatter me. Do not praise my virtues while remaining silent about my vices. Do not fear that the truth will offend me. Do not treasure our friendship, our friendly relations, above my salvation. Do not think that by ignoring my sins you can help. Do not think that being blind to my sins will prove yourself charitable. However I may react to it, whatever may be my attitude toward you after you have done it, give me the truth! For the truth, and only the truth, can make men free from the shackles of sin, strengthen me in the pathway of

righteousness and lead me to the joys of heaven. If I am wavering, weak, lukewarm, indifferent, neglectful; if I have been overtaken in a trespass, if I have been drawn into the pleasures of the world; if I have left first love; if I have been led astray by error; or if I have done none of these, but simply need to grow in knowledge and be edified, give me the truth!

- Bill Crews

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## Humility

Bible students have observed that humility is one of the most commended characteristics in the entire Bible, and from life experiences, have concluded that humility is desperately needed. Its importance as a characteristic of the servant of God is seen in such passages as Micah 6:8, "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?"

Jesus, the Son of God began His earthly life with a humble birth in a stable in the small village of Bethlehem. There was nothing prominent about the village where he was raised following His infancy in Egypt. He lived into his early thirties, but described his home ownership this way: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Matthew 8:20). We are confident by His teaching that He acquired few possessions during His lifetime (Matthew 11:28-30). Notice how He described His own character in verse 29: "I am gentle and humble in heart."

The inspired advocate of practical Christianity, James, stated: "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6; cf. Proverbs 3:34). The Lord God fights against people who exalt themselves above others. Hence, humility is opposite of haughtiness, pride and arrogance, characteristics of the conceited. The humble have a spirit of deference, of submission, viewing themselves as insignificant in many ways. Paul expresses it clearly in his letter to the Philippians: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4).

So many spiritual virtues flow from this quality of humility. Are you humble?

- Gary Smalley

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> "To be happy, do not add to your possessions but subtract from your desires!"

- > "The trouble with being an atheist is you have nobody to talk to when you're alone!"
  - > "People whose main concern is their own happiness seldom find it!"
  - > "Let us pray, not for lighter burdens, but for stronger backs!"
  - > "Don't forget the fact that ignorance of the law is what keeps our higher courts functioning!"
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**THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** The sermon for Sunday morning is: "*Jesus Christ, The Way To A Better Life!*" (Text: John 10:10).

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## ***What Must I Do To Be Saved?***

### **HEAR THE GOSPEL**

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

### **BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST**

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

### **REPENT OF PAST SINS**

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

### **CONFESS CHRIST**

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

### **BE BAPTIZED**

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

### **LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE**

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)